

Om Tat Sat

One of the most famous places where “Om Tat Sat” appears is near the end of the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita is 700 verse poetry, which is from the approximately 100,000 verse epic poem, the Mahabharata.

The Bhagavad Gita outlines the process and goals of Yoga in a story-telling format. The teacher is Krishna, who is a symbol of the absolute, nondual reality, the One without a second. The student is Arjuna, who is a symbol of the typical aspirant of Yoga who initially wants to escape from his life in the external world, and to permanently retreat to the forest. Krishna teaches him how to live “in the world” while also pursuing and attaining the highest level of Enlightenment or Self-realization through the path of Yoga.

The story is told in 18 chapters, symbolic of 18 days of teachings. It all comes together in a crescendo of insight in the 18th chapter, day 18. However, the pinnacle of the teachings and practices comes in the last few verses of chapter 17, which is day number 17. That profound culmination is the mantra, “Om Tat Sat.”

AUM/OM: Absolute reality. That which encompasses the three states of waking, dreaming, deep sleep, represented by AUM, the three levels of gross, subtle, causal, the three levels of conscious, unconscious, subconscious, and the three universal processes of coming, being, and going. Absolute silence beyond the three levels is the silence after AUM. It also refers to Tripura, the one who live in the “three cities” as in Mahamrityunjaya Mantra, as well as the light referred to in Gayatri Mantra.

Tat: Tat is translated simply as “that.” It means that the totality of all which is symbolized by the “Om” is “That” and That is, in fact, “Sat,” which is the last part of the mantra. It’s a bit like saying, “A mango, now ‘that’ is a really delicious fruit!” or, “Mt. Everest, now ‘that’ is a really big mountain,” except here it is saying, “Om, now ‘that’ really says it all, really is the totality of existence!”

Sat: Sat means “existence.” It means existence itself. The mango exists, and the mountain exists, but inherent in them both is existence itself. That quality of existence “exists” for literally anything: all people, all objects in our world, all planets, and all galaxies, as well as all of subtle or causal planes of reality. Nothing is excluded from existence itself. Therefore, “Om Tat Sat!”

Meditation after Japa: When you practice japa (repetition) of the Om Tat Sat mantra, whether pacing yourself with mala or a certain number of minutes, it is best to follow this with a few minutes of silent meditation, simply allowing the mantra to lead to inner silence, with no words or syllables. Just quietly allow attention to rest on the breath at the nostrils, the heart, or the space between the eyebrows.

40 day practice

The period of 40 days has been widely recognized as an auspicious period both in the East and the West since ancient times. A traditional way to do an extended mantra practice is to choose a number of repetitions per day, and to do that for 40 days. The mind likes to have a beginning and end to a practice, a sense of completion, such as comes with a 40 day (or longer) practice.

Fixed time per practice session: Mind finds comfort in knowing that it will do the practice of one round of 108 repetitions of the beads on a mala (or some other number of rounds), and that each round will take a predictable amount of time (approximately 18 minutes per round of 108 repetitions, plus or minus).

Same number of rounds: Mind also likes the predictability of doing a certain number of rounds done per day. Mind may resist at times, but once it gets started in the practice, mind likes the habit.

Specific number of days: Mind also likes the plan of knowing how many days or months a practice will take to complete. This can be very beneficial in stabilizing a noisy mind, which is a common complaint.

Freedom in discipline: It has been said that there is freedom in discipline; choosing to do a regular practice frees the mind from wondering what practice will be done that day. It is also important not to do the mantra practice with rote repetition, but rather, with feeling and awareness.

Decide for yourself: By running your own experiment for 40 days, you can decide for yourself the degree to which the practice is beneficial.

Extended practice

Purascharna: A noticeable level of mantra siddhi (power of the mantra) is said to come with 125,000 repetitions of a mantra. Such an extended practice is called a purascharna. This is equivalent to 1250 rounds of a mala, traditionally counting 100 of the 108 beads.

Malas per day / Approximate minutes per day / Total days / Total months

1	5 min	1250	42
2	10 min	625	21
3	15 min	417	14
4	20 min	313	10.5
5	25 min	250	8.5
6	30 min	209	7

8	40 min	156	5.2
9	45 min	139	4.6
10	50 min	125	4.2
11	55 min	114	3.8
15	1 hr, 15 min	83	2.8
20	1 hr, 40 min	63	2.1
25	2 hrs, 5 min	50	1.7
30	2 hrs, 30 min	42	1.4
35	2 hrs, 55 min	36	1
40	3 hrs, 20 min	31	1

Stabilizing Mind: Such an extended practice with Om Tat Sat mantra can have an excellent effect in stabilizing the mind in preparation for advancing in meditation. Such a practice must be done personally to understand the benefits. It does take commitment to do this practice every day for such a long period, but it is worth the effort.

Have Stability: In choosing the level of practice per day, it is important to have stability from one day to the next, and to not skip any days. It is best to choose the level that works for you consistently, rather than changing the number from day to day. For example, if two rounds per day is a good number, then it's better to stay with that amount each and every day, not to do none on one day, but four on the next day.

Mahapurascharna: A very long japa practice is called Mahapurascharna (maha=great, large, or long). A mahapurascharna of Om Tat Sat is 300,000 repetitions, or 3,000 malas. This practice is done by people who have sufficient time available. A one year practice will take about 15 malas per day, about 2 hours per day. Do the math with your calculator.

This practice is extremely useful, and while it is not as intense as Gayatri or Mahamrityunjaya, it is best done with ongoing, regular contact with a yogi who has already completed such a practice, as it has a purifying effect when the unconscious comes forward; it is best to have somebody to talk with about your experiences.